

HISTORY MADE HERE

1997

**MARCH 28**

GRAND OPENING OF DISNEY'S
WIDE WORLD OF SPORTS COMPLEX
INCLUDED A SPRING TRAINING
MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL GAME

JULY 5-12

FIRST AAU BOYS BASKETBALL
NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP

1998

FEB. 13-MARCH 25

ATLANTA BRAVES RELOCATE TO
THE SPORTS COMPLEX FROM WEST
PALM BEACH FOR SPRING TRAINING

DECEMBER 7-13

FIRST POP WARNER SUPER BOWL
AND CHEER & DANCE NATIONAL
CHAMPIONSHIP

2000

DECEMBER 26-30

DISNEY SOCCER SHOWCASE,
THE PREMIER YOUTH SOCCER
EVENT IN THE NATION, BEGINS
ITS FIRST YEAR



2002

JULY 29- AUG. 21

TAMPA BAY BUCCANEERS TRAINING
CAMP MARKS FIRST PRE-SEASON
TRAINING CAMP



2006

MARCH 7-10

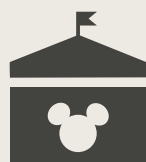
THE OPENING GAMES OF
THE INAUGURAL WORLD BASEBALL
CLASSIC TAKE PLACE



2008

JULY 6

GRAND OPENING OF THE J CENTER,
THE MULTI-SPORT FACILITY THAT
HOUSES INDOOR SPORTS



2009

MARCH 6-8

INAUGURAL
DISNEY PRINCESS HALF
MARATHON WEEKEND



2010

FEBRUARY 25

A HOST OF SPORTS STARS HELP
KICK OFF THE OPENING OF THE
NEWLY RE-IMAGINED ESPN WIDE
WORLD OF SPORTS COMPLEX

OCTOBER 1-3

INAUGURAL DISNEY WINE & DINE
HALF MARATHON WEEKEND

2012

FEBRUARY 11

FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA
SPEAKS TO HUNDREDS OF CHILDREN
AND THEIR PARENTS ABOUT THE
IMPORTANCE OF HEALTHY LIVING
DURING "LET'S MOVE!" HEALTH
INITIATIVE EVENT

JUNE 19-27

AAU SETS THE WORLD RECORD FOR
LARGEST VOLLEYBALL TOURNAMENT
DIVISION

2013

JANUARY 13

20TH ANNIVERSARY
OF WALT DISNEY WORLD®
MARATHON



2014

FEBRUARY 27

ESPN RELOCATES
JOHN GRUDEN'S QB CAMP
TO THE COMPLEX

MARCH 29-SEPT. 6

ORLANDO CITY SOCCER
PLAYS FULL REGULAR SOCCER
SEASON AT THE COMPLEX

2016

APRIL 15-17

INAUGURAL *STAR WARS*™ HALF
MARATHON – THE DARK SIDE

MAY 5-12

OVER 500 WOUNDED, ILL AND
INJURED MILITARY PERSONNEL
COMPETE IN THE INVICTUS GAMES

2017

JANUARY 25-28

NFL PRO BOWL WEEK MOVES
FROM HAWAII TO ORLANDO WITH
A FULL WEEK OF FOOTBALL
EVENTS, ACTIVITIES AND PRACTICES
AT THE COMPLEX

MARCH 28

ESPN WIDE WORLD OF SPORTS
COMPLEX CELEBRATES 20 YEARS



ESPN WIDE WORLD OF SPORTS COMPLEX

WALT DISNEY WORLD® Resort

How ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex evolved to be globe's premier youth sports tourism destination

Back in 1994, as the Notre Dame football team and droves of its fans were about to head to Orlando for a marquee national game against Florida State, the newly-formed sports group at Walt Disney World® Resort saw an opportunity. While the game was scheduled for Saturday, Nov. 12, the Fighting Irish players, coaches and fans surely would be looking for other things to do while they were in town.

So the folks at Disney Sports put together a bevy of options for their visitors there to root for Notre Dame – packages that included stays at Walt Disney World Resort hotels, theme park tickets, a Disney- MGM Studios takeover, a block party and a Friday night pep rally.

"It exceeded everybody's expectations," said John Anthony, president and CEO of Anthony Travel, a travel provider for Disney Sports. "We sold thousands and thousands of packages all because a sports event was coming into town."

The success resulting from the effort around the Notre Dame-Florida State game opened eyes around Disney to this realization: Sports is an immensely powerful tool that can add tremendous incremental value to the company.

Three years later, in 1997, Disney's Wide World of Sports Complex opened its doors. Rebranded ESPN Wide World of Sports in 2010, the complex is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year as host to more than 100 events—from the Pop Warner Super Bowl, to the World Cheerleading Championships, to the NFL Pro Bowl Week, to the Disney Cup International soccer tournament.

The million-plus athletes, coaches, families and spectators who come to these events every year from all over the world are treated to a sports experience like no other – this is Disney, after all.

"When we first got into this, we didn't know for sure how big sports tourism would be," said Maribeth Bisenerre, senior vice president at Disney Springs and ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex. "We discovered that we had individuals coming (for sports events) who may never have come here on a Disney vacation. It was a great opportunity to introduce them to a Disney vacation experience, and that has continued over the 20 years. It's been a great success when you consider the one-of-a-kind experience the guests have when they are here."



ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex globe is a sight familiar to young athletes from around the world who come to compete, learn and enjoy everything that Walt Disney World® has to offer.

An aspirational place for young athletes

With 15 fields for soccer and football, 16 diamonds for baseball and softball, including an 9,500-seat ballpark, track-and-field and tennis facilities, and, as of January 2018, three field houses (see page 6), ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex can handle events of nearly any size.

"We can accommodate just about any tournament that comes our way," said Faron Kelley, vice president, Disney Sports. "That is a blessing for us, to be able to be a single-site provider where parents don't have to get in their cars and drive from field to field and to different places. To have it all in one space is a huge advantage that we bring to the game."

The fields and courts on which young athletes at Disney compete are professional quality. In fact, some of the best athletes in the world compete or train on the same fields and courts. This is incredibly aspirational for kids.

"It's important that every athlete feels like this is their opportunity to play on a field that a professional football player practiced on or a famous soccer player played on, or run on a track that somebody who's now competing in international championships ran on, and to understand that they are as just as important as any professional athlete," Bisenerre said. "We really try to deliver on that."

Dr. Roger Goudy, president/CEO of

AAU, said when his organization was negotiating its deal with Disney 20 years ago, the company promised its athletes would be playing at facilities that rank amongst in the best in the world.

"They fulfilled that promise," Goudy said. "Whatever facility we're in – whether it be the basketball venue, the softball or baseball fields that the Atlanta Braves also use, or the track, it's top-notch. When the kids come, they're just in awe because number one, it's the finest surface they can play on; number two,

they're playing on the same surface that professional football players played on."

In conjunction with the rebranding of the complex with the ESPN name in 2010, an ESPN broadcast facility was built, enhancing the aspirational element for young athletes.

Now, with high-definition cameras at just about every venue at the sports complex, plus a direct pipeline to the sports media company's headquarters in Bristol, Conn., a number of youth sports events happening at Disney – such as the Pop Warner Super Bowl and several AAU championships – are broadcast on ESPN outlets.

There's also an ESPN Wide World of Sports channel on the televisions in all Walt Disney World Resort hotel rooms, where athletes can watch highlights of themselves competing.

"That makes the youth athletes feel like they've made it to the big time," Kelley said.

"I remind (my) team all the time: We're Disney, we make dreams come true," said Bisenerre. "That's what we're about. Our vacations are about that, but so are our sports experiences. Every single youth athlete who is out there, I want them to feel like their dream is coming true. And that's the experience they're getting, whether that is being filmed and played on the televisions in our guest rooms or playing on the fields next to professionals."

"With Orlando as our hometown, magic has always been a key strand

of our DNA. The expanded partnership with Disney brings our story full circle and represents the coming together of two dynamic

organizations that have become synonymous with Orlando."

*Orlando Magic CEO
Alex Martins*

at Walt Disney World Resort

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TRACK & FIELD FACILITY + CROSS COUNTRY COURSE

SOON TO BE

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FOR BASKETBALL • CHEER • VOLLEYBALL AND OTHER INDOOR SPORTS

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- CUSTOMIZED EVENT MERCHANDISE
- POST-GAME CELEBRATION IN THE DISNEY PARKS

ESPN WWOS.COM

Sports tourism, the Disney way

At many youth sports sites, there's not much for the athletes and their families to do once the day's competition is over. Not so at ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex, given it's located at the world's No. 1 family vacation destination. The menu of fun that Walt Disney World Resort has to offer includes *Magic Kingdom®* Park, *Epcot®*, *Disney's Hollywood Studios®*, *Disney's Animal Kingdom®* Theme Park, two water parks and some of the worlds' best entertainment and restaurants at Disney Springs®, plus a variety of hotels to suit any guest.

"You go to some tournaments and after the final buzzer or after the game's over, what do you do? You go back and sit in your hotel, you go out to eat, maybe you go to a movie," Kelley said. "We're at Walt Disney World, and for every kid that comes to play, every parent, every sibling that comes along, when the game's over, whether you won or lost, you're at Disney World, and that's what makes it a great experience for everyone who comes to ESPN Wide World of Sports."

So for athletes and their families, as well as coaches, officials and fans, a tournament at ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex becomes a magical vacation of a lifetime.

"We offer a robust experience for the whole family, not just the athlete," Bisienere said.

"Disney is the premier example of how you can create a leisure vacation experience

while you're here competing," said George Aguel, senior president and CEO at Visit Orlando and a former senior vice president at Disney. "That's an absolute principle that made ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex so popular."

Added USA Competitions' Randy Sikora, whose organization's Presidential Classic gymnastic event is held at ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex every February, "For most of the kids who compete at Disney, it's a once in a lifetime experience, and it's magical because it's Disney. It'll be a memory that will last a lifetime for them because it's more than just a gymnastics competition. It's a gymnastic competition with Mickey Mouse, and nobody (else) has that. It's pictures that they'll look at 20 years from now and still remember."

The power of sports

As this industry knows, sports are powerful. For Disney, sports brings folks from all over the world who may have never had the chance to get to Disney otherwise.

Over the past decade, ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex has seen a sharp increase in the number of international events it hosts. This year, for instance, the complex will draw people from more than 70 countries.

With the chance to not only see their kids compete but also to visit Disney, parents usually don't pass on the opportunity.

"With their proximity to our international airport, and their world class attractions, resorts and amenities, and because of the way in which Disney




The 9,500 seat baseball stadium, used by the Atlanta Braves spring training has all the elements of a major league field.



When young athletes compete at ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex they play on fields that replicate and match professional fields.



The ability of ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex to both stage sports events and entertain fans has drawn events ranging from AAU Championships to the NFL Pro Bowl.



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We've combined the power of ESPN and the magic of Disney to bring you the ultimate team sports experience. An experience that starts the moment you arrive. Enter venues that look like places the pros play—because they've been designed that way. And wherever you play. The field. The pitch. The gridiron. The court. It doesn't matter. Here, the sports spotlight shines bright. And it's focused on you.

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does business and serves their customers, they make it an exceptionally positive experience for their patrons, an experience second to none," said Jason Siegel, interim president and CEO, Central Florida Sports Commission. "Not only does that translate into economic impact, but it also translates into repeat business."

"Parents make a special effort to (attend their kids' events)," said Aguel. "And they get a little taste of what it's like to visit the parks, what it's like to have the Disney experience, and it (makes) them say 'You know, we just have to come back.'"

Another realization Disney has had over the last 20 years is that sports are often resilient to economic downturns.

"When we got to the recession in 2001 and the bubble burst, you found the real value of sports tourism," Anthony said. "Disney found a sweet spot for their business. While families were canceling vacations right and left, and companies were canceling corporate travel and incentive trips, the sports market held strong, particularly when you promised your children that if they qualified for an event at Disney, which would usually be a national championship, they would still go."

Said Kelley, "Even during economic downturns, we see that parents will continue to invest in vacations for their kids around sports. (They say), 'We don't want the kids to miss a tournament.' So when they come to our place, they get the double-dip – they get the vacation and they get the tournament – so it's a win-win for parents."

"I have a lot of great memories from being at ESPN Wide World of Sports."

When I coached the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, our Super Bowl drive started with training camp at the sports complex. We televised the Pro Bowl Skills Showdown on ESPN from there in 2017, and, of course,

it's been a spectacular home for Gruden's QB Camp. It's really a world-class facility."

–Super Bowl-winning NFL coach and ESPN Monday Night Football analyst Jon Gruden



No matter what the sport, ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex gives young athletes the opportunity to play on fields and in facilities that match the standards of professional sports.




**A winning team
creating magical
sports experiences!**

*Congratulations
on 20 years!*



Every event at ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex features unmistakable and unique features that only Disney can provide.

State-of-the art arena at ESPN Wide World of Sports adds new jewel to the sports complex

When ESPN Wide World of Sports opens its arena in early 2018, it will add a new dimension to an already robust sports complex at Walt Disney World® Resort in Florida that hosts more than 100 entertainment and sports events each year. The 8,000-seat, 300,000-square-foot venue will allow events that call Disney home an opportunity to expand, and it also unlocks Disney's potential to bring in new events, particularly in emerging sports.

Flexibility

The state-of-art arena will be the first venue of its size in the world specifically designed for cheerleading, dance and other indoor sports. But aside from its many unique features, what is most impressive about the arena is its flexibility. This will allow ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex to host even more events simultaneously.

"How can we make sure we're maximizing each weekend?" Faron Kelley, vice president, Disney Sports, said of his group's charge. "We're looking at times of the year that we can do even more events. It's probably no surprise to anyone it's a little rainy certain afternoons of the year in Florida, so having the new indoor venue is going to allow us to expand into additional indoor spaces during the summer season."



The new 8,000-seat, 300,000-square foot arena, scheduled to open in 2018, will give ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex an expanded ability to host a wide range of indoor sports.

The arena's flexibility will be on full display during a variety of the most prestigious cheer and dance events produced by Varsity Spirit, LLC.

With the building's ability to be segmented into four quadrants, there will be four preliminaries taking place simultaneously. Then, after a quick and seamless conversion, two semifinals will be contested in their respective halves of the arena, and when it's time for the finals, the entire arena will be dedicated to the competition.

Room to grow

While Disney Sports continues to see competitive cheerleading as a major growth sport and is keen on remaining a leader in that business, the arena also

will enhance other key sports in the ESPN Wide World of Sports' portfolio, such as basketball, volleyball and gymnastics.

"It's going to give us ultimate flexibility," said Maribeth Bisienere, senior vice president of Disney Springs and ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex. "We now have the space to hold large events that we didn't always have the capability of doing before."

The AAU Girls' Junior National Volleyball Championships, already certified as the world's largest volleyball tournament, will get even bigger as it moves into the new building at Disney. What started as a tournament with 123 teams has grown every year to the point that 2,438 teams competed on nearly 200 courts last year. In 2016, over 30,000 athletes, 8,000 coaches and

100,000 spectators attended the extravaganza.

While the event expands beyond ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex to other sites around Orange County, as it grows by as many as 140 teams a year, space has become limited. The new arena goes a long way toward meeting that challenge.

"It gives us a huge footprint," said Kelley. "It becomes the big brother to our already very quality indoor spaces. With 8,000 seats, it's a nice size for a lot of events that are happening nowadays."

"It's going to be a welcome addition because of the amount we're growing every year," added AAU president/CEO Dr. Roger Goudy. "We've run out of room at the Orange County convention center."

In addition, this year marks the 20th anniversary of USA Competitions' Presidential Classic, which has tripled in size, according to USA Competitions' Randy Sikora. While about 3,500 gymnasts competed last year, the move to the new arena will allow the event to welcome 1,000 additional athletes in February.

"It's going to give us the opportunity to grow our event and be able to share the experience with even more athletes from all over the world," Sikora said. "We were at maximum capacity."

(see Arena page 10A)

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SPORTS**
at Walt Disney World Resort

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The Orlando Magic congratulate
Walt Disney World® Resort
as they celebrate 20 years of magic
at ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex.



A large red archway with the 'Walt Disney World RESORT' logo in white script and stars. Below the arch, a group of cheerleaders in white uniforms with red accents and large white bows in their hair are performing a routine. They are holding red and white rectangular signs. The scene is set at night with blue and purple lighting.

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ESPN Wide World of Sports: Inspiring female leaders in the sports industry

With more and more females taking the field to compete in sports, there also has been a growth in the number of women in leadership roles within the sports industry.

That growth is apparent at ESPN Wide World of Sports, which has launched, grown and nurtured the careers of many female executives, including Disney's Maribeth Bisienere and Kelly Blakely, and Central Florida Sports Commission's Jennifer Lastik.



Maribeth Bisienere, senior vice president of Disney Springs and ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex

Growing up in Boston as one of five sisters, Bisienere's passion for sports was instilled at an early age by her father, an avid fan of the city's teams.

"He made sure every one of his daughters loved sports as much as he did," Bisienere smiled. "We grew up robust fans of all Boston sports. For me, this developed into a love and passion for all sports. I love the competitiveness of it."

Sports, though, wasn't the only passion point Bisienere took from her father. When he wasn't watching his favorite teams, he was working in the restaurant business, and as part of a big Italian family, Bisienere found that hospitality came naturally for her.

In 1995, Bisienere's career path through the hospitality industry brought her to *Walt Disney World Resort®*, one of the foremost hospitality companies in the world, as general manager of Disney's Caribbean Beach Resort. As she made her way up the company's ranks, the opportunity arose for Bisienere to merge her two passions.

In 1997, Disney opened what is now known as ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex, a site that has developed over the last 20 years as the nation's premier sports tourism destination, and in 2014, Bisienere was promoted to senior vice president of Disney Springs and ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex.

"I've been lucky to work in a company that embraces diversity," Bisienere said of her promotion to a senior executive position in sports. "But I've always made sure I follow a good balance of my business acumen with my passion, and when you combine the two, it works quite well."

Kelly Blakely, general manager of sports logistics and event management

for ESPN Wide World of Sports, concurs.

"One thing Maribeth has always reiterated to us in everything we do is that the best decisions are made when you bring a diverse group of people together," said Blakely. "When we're coming up with new ideas, we make sure we have that kind of group around the table."

While the sports industry has been traditionally dominated by men, Bisienere sees the business evolving, and she's proud that she and Disney can inspire young women who want to pursue careers in sports. "A lot has changed because more women are playing sports than ever before," she said. "We've got 50 percent of our athletes at ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex that are young girls. We want to make sure that we have a lot of females in the roles that they may emulate and watch. For me, it is about making sure that women have the opportunity any male athlete or male leader is capable of doing."

Jennifer Lastik capitalized on that opportunity when her career in the sports business began in 2005 as an event management intern with Disney Sports (now known as ESPN Wide World of Sports).

"Disney was one of the best experiences of my life," said Lastik, who now works as the senior vice president of events at the Central Florida Sports Commission. "The Disney experience, the standard of training and the doors it opened helped pave the way for my career."

Lastik continues to keep in touch with the connections she made during her time at ESPN Wide World of Sports and works closely with the organization to help draw even more events to Central Florida. In addition to networking, Lastik stresses the importance of mentoring for those wanting to develop in their careers in sports.

"Make sure you are working with mentors and sponsors to help lift you up and coach you along the way," Lastik says. "Male or female, I think that's a big part of learning as you progress through your career."

Blakely agrees and is actively involved in making sure that development is available at ESPN Wide World of Sports.

"While I have always been passionate about sports, I certainly felt I had a lot to learn when I came into the organization, but I had a lot to give, too," she said. "It's always been important to me that I am engaging in the mentoring experience



Kelly Blakely, general manager of sports logistics & event management at ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex

and helping to inspire everyone in the business."

Blakely has hosted a number of women's leadership discussions at ESPN Wide World of Sports, including annual broadcasts from ESPN's Bristol campus. These sessions provide an opportunity to network and connect with others while learning from experts and panels on topics ranging from authenticity to patience in one's career.

"The folks at ESPN Wide World of Sports have made a terrific impact within the local sports community when it comes to human capital," Jason Siegel, interim CEO and president at the Central Florida Sports Commission, said. "They have produced some fantastic leaders. We've been in business 25 years, and within the last three years we've had six employees come from their program (three women, three men) and a number of others who have sat on our Board of Directors."

"Maribeth encourages us to focus on how we can up our game," said Blakely. "Every time we talk about an event, Maribeth will always ask the question, 'What are we going to do differently?' And that's really important to me. We want to grow with our guests."



As for aspiring female sports executives, Bisienere advises them to be aggressive, confident and learn how to differentiate themselves.

"Find where you stand out, stand



Jennifer Lastik, senior vice president of events at Central Florida Sports Commission


out from the rest of the group, find places where you know you can add a tremendous amount of value and develop those different competencies that will set you apart from others," she added. "Study, have a high level of competency and go with your passions, and you should be able to achieve whatever it is you'd like to achieve."


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ESPN Wide World of Sports partners with organizers to stage world-class events

As the youth sports industry grows, so do the challenges event organizers face. There are larger numbers of participants and spectators to accommodate, there are cultural differences to address as events become more global, and there is stiffer competition in the marketplace.

At ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex at Walt Disney World® Resort in Florida, Disney taps into its multitude of unique assets that can help overcome these challenges for event organizers.

"They come to us with a base-level idea, and we'll engage with them in conversations about everything from, 'Hey, let's bring ESPN to the table,' or, 'Let's add some Disney entertainment elements for opening and closing ceremonies,'" Faron Kelley, vice president, Disney Sports, said of working with the event organizers. "There are different ways where we can say, 'You know what, this event is great that you brought to us, but how can we make it an event that can only happen here?'"

"That's what makes it lots of fun. It's a great experience for the kids and parents, and it gives us a real competitive advantage."

Here are four ways Disney Sports strives to ensure events at ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex are among the finest on earth:



ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex's experience in producing magical events are unmatched by any venue.

The more the merrier

Sports events at Disney tend to grow every year. That means more athletes competing on more field and courts, as well as more families, more coaches, more officials and more spectators.

None of that phases the folks in Orlando.

"It almost always comes down to the size, scope and time of year for each project" said Jason Siegel, interim president and CEO of the Central Florida Sports Commission. "So many promoters have done a great job growing their events, so it's Disney's reputation for managing large scale tournaments and competitions and their ability to handle the volume of folks coming in and out of their complex that makes the difference and gives them a competitive advantage."

"While that can present a challenge, they've done a really good job overcoming that because of their square footage, their size, and how efficient they are in managing relationships. They're really good at what they do, and I think that's why they have so much success."

★ NOVEMBER 23, 24 & 26, 2017 ★

ESPN Events is hosting the AdvoCare Invitational at ESPN Wide World of Sports at Walt Disney World® Resort.

Celebrate Thanksgiving a different way with some of the best teams in College Basketball.

This year's field features West Virginia University, University of Missouri, St. John's University, University of Central Florida, University of Nebraska, Oregon State University, Long Beach State University, Marist College.



ESPN EVENTS

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(Arena from page 6A)

In addition to helping current Disney partners grow their events, the arena at ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex opens new opportunities for the company, with the emerging platforms of eSports and futsal prominent on their radar.

"We're always looking at where the growth is and where sports are going," Bisienere said. "We're trying to diversify all the time."

As the sports industry is still figuring out eSports, the flexibility at ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex offers plenty of options for the up-and-coming eSports business.

"Our new venue is already starting to garner a lot of interest from the industry," Kelley said of eSports. "We see this as a growing sport and a growing industry."

In addition, ESPN Wide World of Sports' planned hosting of a youth training academy sponsored by La Liga- the Spanish soccer league has sparked interest from international organizations across multiple sports, including rugby, field hockey

and futsal, about holding tournaments at the complex, according to Kelley.

Cementing Central Florida as a sports destination

The arena also gives the greater Central Florida region another gem with which to attract promoters shopping for sites for their events.

Any organization that decides to come to ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex is bound to put its event on the long list of Central Florida sports successes. Fans packed Camping World Stadium for the NFL's Pro Bowl and for top college football games hosted by Florida Citrus Sports. WrestleMania 33 set a new attendance record for the venue when it drew 75,245 fans in April. A crowd of over 62,000 attended Orlando City Soccer's inaugural

MLS match in 2015. "You can see the success our community has had in hosting all these events," said Jason Siegel, interim president and CEO, Central Florida Sports Commission. "Promoters are thrilled, because whether they're running a small tournament or they are hosting a major event, we know how to host, promote and operate events, and we can also drive ticket sales. ...

"Look at our resume – 68 million visitors this past year, 200,000 hotel rooms, vacation homes and rental properties, we've got beautiful weather, world-class attractions and an international airport," Siegel added.

Adding the arena at ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex to a roster of venues that already features the 65,000-seat Camping World Stadium, 25,500-seat Orlando City Stadium, 20,000-seat Amway Center and the Orange County Convention Center creates more opportunities for events looking for an 8,000-seat venue in the region.

Orlando is in conversations with U.S. Soccer about being part of the country's joint bid with Mexico and Canada to host the 2026 World Cup, and ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex fits into those plans. There may be opportunities for the region not only to host matches, but also training sites and base camps, according to Siegel.

"It will be very impactful and necessary when we dive into crux of the World Cup bid to seek (Disney's) support," said Siegel, who sees opportunities for the region and complex.

"There will be a tremendous number of unique opportunities that'll present themselves. As a region we're incredibly diverse, but make no mistake one of the jewels is ESPN Wide World of Sports," Siegel said.

Bisienere added of the new arena, "A big part of what we do is work with the community of Orlando, and this is another great option for them."

"Over the last 20 years, hundreds of thousands of cheerleaders

and dancers from across the U.S. and around the world have competed and celebrated at the ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex. By hosting our events at ESPN Wide World of Sports, we're able to truly

provide our customers with a world-class experience, from the thrill of competition to the magic of the theme parks at the Walt Disney World Resort." - Jeff Webb, Founder and Chairman of Varsity Brands

"First class is the word often mentioned by all of us

in the MAAC that work with our partners at the ESPN Wide World of Sports, and is echoed in the comments of appreciation we hear

from the conference's student-athletes, fans and families." - Rich Ensor, MAAC Commissioner



Beautiful sunset at ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex.

"Our mission of elevating the student experience is brought to life

through our events at the ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex. From the minute they step on the property, our athletes feel like champions. For these

athletes and their families the entire experience is a celebration, regardless of how they ultimately place." - Bill Seely, President of Varsity Spirit

ESPN
WIDE WORLD OF
SPORTS
at Walt Disney World Resort

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Entertainment, the Disney way

Many events at ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex feature Disney-themed opening and closing ceremonies, giving young athletes treatment worthy of Olympians.

Two years ago at the AAU Girl's Junior National Volleyball Championships at ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex, the competitors took part in the world's largest singalong to songs from the iconic Disney movie "Frozen."

According to ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex senior vice president Maribeth Bisienere, conversations with partners begin with this question: "What types of things can we offer that's a differentiator so kids have a unique experience here?"

"The opening ceremonies are always spectacular," said AAU president/CEO Dr. Roger Goudy. "It's full-blown Disney magic and fireworks and just quite a spectacle. They make it an event, and the athletes bring their parents, brothers, sisters, aunts and uncles and grandmas and grandpas—they bring everybody down because it's a once in a lifetime experience."

Of course, Mickey and Minnie Mouse, Donald Duck and Goofy have been known to make appearances at the youth sports events, too.

"It's probably as exciting for the kids that come as the competition itself," USA Competitions' Randy Sikora said of the entertainment at Disney.

Disney speaks many languages

With more than a million guests from more than 60 countries visiting ESPN Wide World of Sport Complex each year, there are language barriers to hurdle and cultural gaps to bridge.

USA Competitions' Presidential Classic alone draws people from about 15 countries, many of whom don't speak English or count it as their second or third language. Disney has worked with the organization to come up with a translation system to help ease the language burden for athletes and other guests.

The challenge of so many visitors from abroad goes beyond language, though.

"It's a combination of language and culture," Sikora said. "When you have teams that are coming from, for instance Peru, it's not just the language, it's the culture of

how we would run our competition, and a foreign team that comes may not be used to our format. Disney has worked with us to provide a hospitable way to make people feel comfortable competing in a gymnastics competition."

Get in the flow

Expanding more than 40 square miles, Walt Disney World Resort is a bustling property. For athletes competing at ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex, the Disney Sports staff, well-versed in hospitality and event management, is there to help athletes and spectators seamlessly navigate their way around the resort so that they maximize their fun.

The Cast Member staff works with organizers to manage the flow of events to make sure multi-day competitions run according to schedule, while also giving athletes and their families ample time to enjoy the world-famous Disney theme parks.

"Their hospitality has put people at ease when they've had some anxiety about not knowing where to go, what to do," Sikora said. "It's a pretty enormous venue. For a lot of people that come, this is the largest competition they've ever

been to. That can be intimidating, and Disney Cast Members are masters at helping put people at ease. These were things we didn't really anticipate going into it, that it would be an awe-inspiring event, not just a gymnastics competition."

The AAU's Goudy added of the Disney Sports staff, "They work closely with our marketing department on the different options people have for accommodations, or the different theme park or water park options the kids have. Our marketing team works with them on a regular basis so that the kids can take advantage of all the opportunities that are available."

Overall, Sikora said his partners in Orlando have "helped us grow by being able to leverage the Disney experience and give people that visit us from all over the country and all over the world the ability to make a vacation out of it. And having the event at a world-class facility has propelled the event."

Goudy added, "It's great to work with them because they have some of the most creative people around and they have some of the highest-level thinkers in youth sports. When you deal with that kind of people, things get done. It's been a great relationship and I hope it goes on forever."



Maribeth Bisienere and her team made it a goal to make sure all athletes enjoy competing at ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex.





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